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Village of Pennock, Neighborhood of Chicago, IL.

The little Village of Pennock (founded: 1881) was located at Diversey Street and Ballou (St. Louis Ave.), Fullerton and Crawford (Pulaski Rd.) avenues. It was annexed by the City of Chicago in 1889.

Homer Pennock was the founder of the Village of Pennock and was the most prominent figure there in the early days of the area.

Centered on Wrightwood Avenue, which was originally called "Pennock Boulevard", was planned to be a hefty industrial and residential district. Lots were laid out, subdivisions added and business enterprises made their appearance. The original name of the Healy Metra Station was originally named after this now lost settlement.

Thwarted by circumstances as well as the decline of Homer Pennock's fortune, this district declined to the point of ruins.

In the June 14, 1903 Chicago Sunday Tribune, wrote an article about the neighborhood:

"A DESERTED VILLAGE IN CHICAGO"

Standing like tombstones over a village that now exists only in name, there are within Chicago's borders a dozen or more picturesque ruins which represent all that is left of what once promised to be a great manufacturing center.

And hanging about the crumbling bricks and rotting timber is an almost forgotten chapter in the city's history - a story of a boom that collapsed almost before it gains an impetus and left its promoter with little more than the valuable farm land to show for the money he had invested.

How many Chicagoans, as they are whisked by the station of Pennock on the St. Paul railway, have viewed the great ruins and wondered what they meant? And how many, to this day, can tell? Few of the oldest residents of the neighborhood are able to explain, and then in the vaguest way.

"Why, there was a soap factory there once - a long, long time ago," one will say.

"No, it was a big warehouse - and it burned." another will impart.

But in all the neighborhood, which in most part has been peopled since the big plant and the once substantial brick houses which are adjacent to it were given over to the elements, not one person could be found who could recall the spectacular operations of Homer Pennock, who, in his dreams, saw on the prairie of the northwest side a manufacturing community that would cause the world to marvel.

WILLING TO TAKE CHANCES

It was twenty-two years ago that Pennock, then owner of a rich gold mine in Colorado, came to Chicago, intending to multiply his fortune and startle the financial world. He had the daring of a D'Artagnan [meaning; one who is exceptionally skilled in the use of sexual persuasion.] and was willing to risk his all in a single throw.

The mine was paying - how long it would continue to pay he did not know, but he planned to push his operations forward so rapidly that he would be prepared for any crash that might come.

Out at Fullerton and Fortieth avenues Pennock found a stretch of level farm land that suited his needs. It was within easy access to the St. Paul railway and could be bought for a song, for in those days Chicago did not extend to the far northwest.

Pennock secured options on several thousand acres of land and almost before the farmers knew of his plans car-load after car-load of bricks was being dumped beside that track where the little frame railway station of Pennock now stands. Scores of workmen followed the building material and a foundation 600x650 feet had been erected.

"We'll have a car wheel factory there - the largest in the world." Pennock announced, as he stood by and proudly watched the workmen pilling brick upon brick. The foundation was completed and then came a halt. Perhaps word came from the west which delayed operations - but that is for Pennock himself to tell.

But the interested farmers had not long to wait, for Pennock again serenely confident that his City of Dreams would be carried to a glorious completion, put a force of men at work building what he called "the east wing" of his plant. "The reat will come in time; it's sure to come - it must come," he mused.

When the "east wing" had been completed Pennock set about looking for a tenant, as for some reason or other his car wheel factory had not materialized. Capital was skeptical and hesitated in moving so far out, but Pennock was no to be denied.

BEGINNING OF THE BOOM

Soon the Osgood manufacturing company, makers of refrigerators and certain articles of furniture, moved into the plant and then came the first breath of the short lived boom. The factory employed many hands - as many as 500, some authorities say - and these men had to be housed and fed.

Small stores began to spring up around the neighborhood and the real estate men made a rush to be first on the field. Like other booms, things were overdone. Brick houses that cost $3,000 were erected - and these to accommodate the men of modest wages who were working in the plant Pennock had built!

But all this time Pennock would smile and say: "Better times are coming." and there was magic in his words.

It so happened that Pennock, whatever else he may have been, was no prophet. Better times did not come, either for Pennock or those who had staked their fortunes with his. The plant - already large - was not increased to cover the big foundation and one day all except the somber walls that are now standing, went up in smoke. Pennock's dream was over and the awakening had come.

Then, according to men who were close to Pennock in his venture, the mine out west became unproductive and Pennock's cup of despair was filled to overflowing.

Just what caused the factory fire in not known, but if human hand set it the torch might just as well have been applied to the other buildings that had been erected in the boom town. With the factory gone there was no reason for the existence of the village out on the prairie, and those who had cast their lots with Pennock flocked back to town.

NEGLECTED HOUSES TUMBLE

Thus it came to pass that time and the elements, destroyers of the staunchest structures, laid hold of the buildings that the fire had spared. The brick houses began to crumble, and as Chicago began to spread toward Pennock's abandoned village the boys made pilgrimages to the ruins and aided in the destruction. First window panes and then window casings were broken from their fastenings till soon the elements had the once proud houses at their mercy.

With the expansion of Chicago a few of the brick residences were rescued and patched up, and are now tenanted by families who can afford no better shelter, but many of the $3,000 structures have reached a stage of decay which makes them untenable to the most miserable squatter.

Perhaps no resident of Chicago has a clearer recollection of Pennock and his operations than J. F. Keeney, who held stock in Pennock's mine and bought heavily of farm land in the vicinity of the Dream City.

"It's so long ago that even I have to search my memory," he said in speaking of the village that has gone to ruin. "Pennock came to Chicago fresh from the west, where he had made money in mining, and conceived the idea of building the factory and town out there on the prairie. He was enthusiastic and secured options on farm lands on every side of his plant-to-be. I had owned some stock in his mine - the 'Small Hopes,' I think

he called it - and had made money, so I followed him in his new venture, putting some money into the factory and also buying farm land in the vicinity of the factory.

"As I remember it, the first trouble came when something went wrong with the mine. It filled with water or something of the sort, and Pennock was without the means to carry his operations to completion. He was resourceful, though, and it is hard to say what he might have succeeded in doing had it not been for the fire. As for myself, I held on to the land I had bought and several years after disposed of most of it at a good profit.

"The history of the Village of Pennock is easily told, don't you think?"